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Embracing the causal complexity of intersectionality: Introducing a configurational perspective using fuzzy set Qualitative Comparative Analysis

Female managers often face complex gendered challenges, especially when they navigate in male-dominated business environments (Sealy et al., 2017). Intersections of gender, 'race', age, religion, disability and other types of perceived 'otherness' contribute to how female managers experience the labour market. Intersectionality encourages the understanding of the interaction of these aspects and how they occur within connected social systems and power structures (Hankivsky, 2014). Relational thinking provides underlying theoretical principles according to which a *both/and* frame overrides the prior *either/or* binary thinking. The focus shifts from the analysis of the differences between entities such as woman versus man, black versus white, towards examining their interconnections (Collins & Bilge, 2016). Studying intersectionality is important because it provides a fine-grained view on discursive debates () the contributing factors to oppression, exclusion, forms of discrimination and even harassment. In this study we follow the call of Broadbridge and Simpson (2011) for future research on intersectionality. In particular, we are interested addressing the causal complexity of intersectionality and outline how a configurational approach such as fuzzy set Qualitative Analysis (QCA) could help this exploration (Ragin & Fiss, 2017) and extend the discussion on intersectionality from a methodological perspective (MacKinnon, 2013). While various aspects of intersectionality are already identified in literature, bringing in a configurational perspective can enhance our understanding of interplay of various aspects.

Empirical evidence suggests that the labour market experiences of women of colour, for example, differ considerably from white women's and can be greatly influenced by other factors such as age, class or disability (Bhavnani, 1994). Gender and ageism may also interplay as the following lines of a job advertisement aiming typically at women of certain age demonstrates: "Do you like talking on the phone? Then you are exactly the right person for us. We'll even give you the opportunity to earn money doing it. Are you between 18-35 years of age, with good knowledge of German and looking for a full-time job?" (Schiek & Lawson, 2016, p. 262). The same applies to gender and religion as the recent discourse on ethnic minority Muslim women who wear headscarves signals or other religious attire (Purchase et al., 2018). Degener (2016) reports about interplay between gender and disability, illustrated by the case of a blind woman who suffered insults about why as a blind woman dares to go out

alone from the men she asked for directions from. The interplay between gender and sexual orientation is studied by Marlow and colleagues (2018). Interpretations about gender and age can be intertwined too, for example, women in their 30s are often perceived simultaneously 'too old' and 'too young' at the same time as they are expected to bear children soon and face 'maternity penalty' regardless whether they remain childless, yet they are seen as too young for senior positions (Kelan, 2014).

Fuzzy set QCA helps exploring configurations – combinations of different aspects – that explain the same outcome. It incorporates features associated with both qualitative and quantitative methods. The intrinsic logic of QCA is based on Boolean algebra; through Boolean minimization expressions of complexity can be reduced into a more parsimonious expression, i.e. a short explanation of a certain phenomenon. Wagemann and Schneider (2010) emphasize that complex causality, the core assumption of QCA, indicates that causal relations are equifinal, conjunctural and asymmetric. Equifinality is defined by Katz and Kahn (1978) as the state where a system can reach the same outcome from different initial conditions and through different paths (please note that the word 'condition' is used as a synonym for 'variable' and is a methodological term). The conjunctural aspect of QCA assumes that each path usually consists of a combination of different conditions (although single conditions are also possible) (Ragin, 2008). The asymmetrical nature of QCA allows us to explore different conditions leading to the same outcome (for example, both condition A and condition B can lead to outcome C), whereas in a symmetrical logic only condition A can lead to outcome C, and condition B might weaken or strengthen the correlation between the two (Ragin, 2008).

Using fuzzy set QCA would enable to explore different configurations of intersecting aspects explaining oppression or the lack thereof. The notion of complex causality is already addressed in literature on intersectionality, yet applying a configurational approach opens new avenues in studying this phenomenon. This research aims at introducing specificities of the configurational perspective into studying intersectionality, with special regards to the construction of female managers' experiences. We use preliminary data based on a survey and a handful of in-depth interviews with senior managers to demonstrate the application of the method as well as highlight some potential theoretical contributions to intersectionality literature with special regards to the exploration of configurations and confirming theory in terms of the presence of multiple potential combinations of intersecting aspects.

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